



## Testimony in Support of House Bill 831 – Environment—Septic Systems—Database

February 27, 2023

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony **in support of HB831** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland's Eastern Shore with more than 2,000 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education. The unique sandy soils and high water tables on the Eastern Shore leave the waters of this region particularly susceptible to pollution from failing septic systems. Nutrient and bacterial pollution can cause algal blooms, dead zones, or areas hazardous to swimming or shellfish harvest. **The establishment of a public database populated with standardized information from counties and local jurisdictions on septic systems will help advocacy organizations to more fully understand and track pollution coming into our waterways from these systems.**

As a Riverkeeper, I research and collect water quality data including nitrogen, phosphorus, and fecal enterococci bacteria levels and communicate my findings to communities within my watershed. I am committed to providing this information so that individuals and families can make informed decisions about swimming or recreating in their local waterways. On the Chester, of the 13 sites I monitor for fecal enterococci pollution, three failed to meet the threshold for safe water contact **more than half of the times they were tested, and another nine failed between 10–40% of the time.** ShoreRivers has begun tracking the sources of this bacteria pollution by utilizing DNA testing to identify specific animal sources of this bacterial pollution—whether it be human, poultry, canine, or swine. **Results from 2022 testing indicate the overwhelming majority of DNA present in the Chester is human, making shoreline septic systems a key source to monitor in the years ahead.**

Even Best Available Technology Systems do not guarantee protection from nutrient pollution in our rivers—many systems have a function where the homeowner can switch off the aeration features to reduce noise, an energy consumption. When that feature is disabled, the system has zero capacity to remove nitrogen from the waste water as it moves into drain fields, often within the Critical Area of our rivers.

By the end of 2022 it became clear that nutrient reductions required under the Chesapeake Bay's Pollution Diet, known as Total Maximum Daily Load requirements, would not be met by 2025—a huge disappointment for clean water advocates after a 30-year effort. **On the Eastern Shore, a distinct challenge we face in meeting clean-up efforts is the large number of non-point source polluters—such as septic systems—that impact our waters and are unregulated by laws like the Clean Water Act.** ShoreRivers is a strong proponent for more policies that help to address pollution coming from septic systems. For this reason and others stated above, **we request a favorable report for HB831.**

Sincerely,  
**Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper** on behalf of ShoreRivers

**ShoreRivers**

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher Sassafra Riverkeeper